



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Panelist Biographies

Human Rights in Bangladesh: An Update

Panel I



Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman ('Zaman Ashraf') is a Bangladeshi human rights defender exiled in Hong Kong since the personal security situation for human rights defenders in Bangladesh deteriorated due to a well-documented crackdown on dissidents and human rights activists. Mr. Ashraf is an advocate for the rights of survivors of torture and victims of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances, seeking stronger legal protections and compliance with international law. He has authored many reports and publications on Bangladesh and the South Asian region on issues such as institutional dysfunction in the justice systems and the importance of democratized states having competent rule of law systems, although his name does not always appear on the publications. He has worked extensively with the United Nations Human Rights mechanisms in his capacity as the Main Representative of the Asian Legal Resource Centre, an NGO with General Consultative Status before the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Since 2015, he has made numerous speeches in the UN Human Rights Council on Bangladesh and countries of Asia.



Kristi Ueda is the Donald M. and Susan N. Wilson Fellow in the International Advocacy and Litigation Team at Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. She works on civic space issues and human rights violations in countries in Africa and Asia. Prior to joining RFK Human Rights, Ms. Ueda was a Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles's Right to Counsel Workgroup and a fellow in Human Rights Watch's Africa Division, where she covered xenophobic violence in South Africa. She holds a J.D. from UCLA School of Law with a triple specialization in Critical Race Studies, the David J. Epstein Program in Public Interest Law & Policy, and International and Comparative Law, and is admitted to practice law in the State of California. She also holds a B.A. from UCLA in History and Political Science with a concentration in International Relations.



Julia Bleckner is a senior Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. She holds a PhD in political science from Yale University where she focused on political violence in Bangladesh. Beginning as a Fulbright researcher in Bangladesh in 2011, she has documented and analyzed politics and human rights in Bangladesh for over a decade.



Geoffrey Macdonald, Ph.D. is a Visiting Expert in the South Asia Program at the United States Institute of Peace and the Senior Advisor for the Asia-Pacific Division at the International Republican Institute (IRI). He is also a nonresident Associate at Harvard University's Asia Center. From 2018-2022, Dr. Macdonald was IRI's Bangladesh Country Director, overseeing the design, implementation, evaluation, and financial management of U.S. government-funded programs on civil society capacity building, youth civic education, minority rights, political party strengthening, and countering violent extremism. He lived in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 2019 to 2021. Dr. Macdonald's academic research focuses on political and extremist violence, democratic design, conflict management, and comparative politics with a regional focus on Bangladesh/South Asia. His writing has been published by the U.S. Institute of Peace, *The Washington Post*, *Foreign Policy*, and various other academic and policy outlets. He holds a doctorate from the University of Denver and has taught political science at George Washington University, Grinnell College, and other institutions.

Moderator



Tariq Ahmad is a Foreign Law Specialist with the Law Library of Congress. He has provided legal research reports and memos for congressional staff and committees, executive branch agencies, the federal judiciary and the general public since joining the Law Library of Congress in 2010. His research covers mostly South Asian jurisdictions, including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. He takes a particular research interest in religion and law issues in South Asia and has drafted reports on the validity of Islamic and Hindu marriages in Pakistan and India, and on blasphemy and anti-conversion laws in the region. Mr. Ahmad holds an LLM degree in International Law from American University's Washington College of Law and an LLB from University College London. He also holds a BA in Political Science from Ohio State University.